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ABSTRACT

The transition from the restrictive prison environment to freedom has been related to stress and renewed criminal behavior. To examine the relationship betwen postrelease adjustment and recidivism, data from 27 juveniles' self-reports of the qualitative aspects of their release experiences were examined 1 year after their release. Subsequent detentions, reasons for detention, agencies requesting the detention, and the amount of time between the first studied detention/release and subsequent detentions were recorded. Results indicated that of the 27 participants, four were redetained only once (15 percent), while six (22 percent) were redetained twice, and one was redetained three times within 1 year. Over 63 percent of those redetained were charged with violation of probation and court orders. The smoothness of the transition experience as reported by the youths was negatively correlated with the likelihood of recidivism. No relationship was found between the amount of time in detention and recidivism, between placement location and recidivism, or between the amount of time in the community and the amount of time of the subsequent detention. Some of the findings of this study are consistent with what is indicated in the literature on the recidivism of adults. (LLL)

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Relationships Between Recidivism and the Reentry Experiences of Juvenile Offenders

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CG 017999

This paper was presented at the 92nd annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada, August 24-28, 1984.

ABSTRACT

Nearly all incarcerated individuals are eventually released to the community. The transition from a restrictive institution to freedom has been related to stress and renewed criminal behavior. Given the suspected relationship between postrelease adjustment and recidivism, it can be postulated that if one can facilitate better adjustment, recidivism will decrease. Twenty-seven juveniles who had been placed in a secure detention facility for a minimum period of eight days and were released to the community participated in an earlier study which assessed their reentry experiences soon after release. The current study assessed the extent to which the self-reported qualitative aspects of their release experiences (revealed in this earlier study) were related to recidivism.

It has been suggested that over 95 percent of incarcerated individuals will be released to the community (Glaser, 1964; Michigan Prison Overcrowding Project, 1983). The transition from structure to freedom is considered an uncertain, confusion, and stressful period (Eskridge, Seiter, & Carlson, 1981). This difficult transition to an environment of little restrictions has often resulted in renewed criminal behavior (Wittenberg & LeClair, 1979).

Can we reasonably expect that an individual who has been locked up for a number of days, weeks, months, or years will readjust to the fast-paced real world without problems and without guidance? The postrelease trauma thesis argues that the period immediately following the release of a criminal offender from a secure institution is marked by a particular stress, often resulting in additional criminal acts (Goodstein, 1979; Minor & Courlander, 1979; Wittenberg & LeClair, 1979).

Incarceration is on the rise, as is recidivism. Most literature and research that examines the issue of reintegrating the offender from the institution to the community evaluates these programs in terms of recidivism (Anthony, Buell, Sharratt, & Althoff, 1972). Given the suspicion that postrelease adjustment to the community is related to recidivism, it can be postulated that if one can facilitate better adjustment, recidivism will decrease.

The major factors associated with adults' postrelease success seem to center around jobs, family, friends, and the community

(Briggs, 1979; Culbertson, 1981; Erickson, Crow, Zurcher, & Connett, 19'3; McArthur, 1974; Renzema, 1981; Waller, 1974). A needs assessment of juveniles released from secure detention found that transition smoothness was most strongly related to the amount of time spent with caseworkers and to the final placement location (Feis, 1983).

The Original Study

In a study conducted over a six month period by Feis (1983), all youths who had been detained in a secure juvenile home for a consecutive period of eight days or longer, and who had been released to the community (defined as placement with a relative, in a foster home, or in a group home) were eligible to participate in the study. All 27 youths who were personally asked to participate were successfully interviewed one to two weeks after their release.

The primary source of data for the original study was the Needs Evaluation Survey developed specifically for this study. Its purpose was to assess and evaluate the needs, concerns, problems, and experiences that the youths encountered as a part of their reintegration into the community. The Survey consisted of 130 items for which responses were obtained through a qualitative interview. Questions were a combination of both open- and closed-ended items. The response categories for most items on the Survey were Likert-type scales with response options of 1 through 5.

Interrater reliability, assessed as percent agreement on nearly 25 percent of the interviews ranged from an average of 73 percent total agreement for all scaled items to an average of 91 percent off-by-one agreement (adjacent response categories considered as agreement) for the independent scaled items.

Items with high endorsement frequencies, little variance, or large numbers of missing data were eliminated from scale development. The remaining items were grouped rationally and assessed for their internal consistency (Cronbach, 1970) and discriminant validity (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). This rational-empirical process resulted in the formulation of nine scales which adress issues related to school, court, social, familial, and transitional concerns. The Coefficient Alphas' for these scales ranged from .46 to .88.

The Current Study

The current study sought to assess the extent to whcih the self-reported qualtative aspects of juveniles' release experiences (as evaluated in the previously mentioned study by Feis 1983) are related to recidivism.

Subjects

Subjects were the 27 youths who participated in the original study. These youths had been detained for 10 to 54 days, their ages ranged from 13 to 17, with 21 of the youths beirg older than 15. Seventy-four percent of the youths were male, and 59 percent were white. Seventy-seven percent of the youths had been detained at the

same institution before and 40 percent were charged with violations of probation or court orders. Seventy-four percent of the youths had been released to a parent.

Procedure

The records of these youths were examined one year after their referent release date. The release date just prior to the youth's participation in the study was used as the referent date. Subsequent detentions were recorded, as were the reasons for the detentions, the agencies requestion the detentions, and the amounts of time between the referent detention and subsequent detentions. The relationship between the youths' self-reported reintegration experiences and subsequent offense history was examined.

Recidivism in this case was defined as redetention. Only violations which resulted in an equally or more severe penalty were considered as recidivism. The number of days from release to redetention was also examined as a recidivism variable.

Results

Of the 27 participants, four were redetained only once (15%), while six (22%) were redetained twice, and one was redetained three times within one year. Overall, a total of 11 participants (41%) were redetained at least once.

These 11 participants were in the community from 17 to 298 days, with a median of 73 days, before their first redetention. While the amount of time in for the referent detention ranged from

10 to 54 days, for the first redetention, time in ranged from five to 99 days with a mean of 22 days. Over 63 percent of the 11 participants who were redetained were done so with charges of violations of probation and court orders.

Some of the demographics were related to recidivism in this study. Five times as many boys were not redetained than were, while for the girls, six times as many were redetained than were not (see Figure 1). For recidivists only, whites were in the community significantly longer than were non-whites before they were redetained (see Figure 2). The literature on adult offenders indicates that if one is going to reoffend, it is done so soon after release. This appears to hold true for non-whites, while it does not hold for the whites in this study.

The number of days in detention for the referent offense was positively correlated ($r=.65$, $p<.05$) with the number of days in detention for the first redetention (see Figure 3). This indicates that the penalties imposed from one detention to the next are somewhat consistent. However, it could also mean that once a person is detained for a relatively long period of time, they will continue to be detained at equally lenghty periods of time.

A number of the variables related to recidivism of adult offenders (or the equivalent variables for juveniles) were also found to be related to that of the youths in this study. The smoothness of the transition experience as reported by the youths was negatively cor-

related ($r=-.40$, $p<.05$) with the likelihood of recidivism (see Figure 4). This relationship is as one would expect: the smoother the transition, the less likely one would be to recidivate.

Table 1 shows the relationship between some of the scales and variables and recidivism. The better the relationship with the caseworker, the more likely the youth was to remain in the community. More than two times as many youths who felt comfortable with the rules of probation were likely to remain in the community than to be redetained (see also Figure 5). For those who reported a more positive and smooth transitional experience, the more likely they were to remain in the community (see also Figure 6).

Two of the significant relationships presented in Table 1 are in the oppostie direction of what might have been predicted. These findings indicate that the less comfortable one is in discussing detention with others, the more likely they are to remain in the community. This finding however, is not necessarily negative. It could be that those who reported feeling comfortable in discussing detention with others did so in a bragging sense; and therefore one would expect such persons, who present themselves as proud for having been in detention, to be redetained, as they were in this study.

The other potentially negative finding was that those who were concerned about school problems were more likely to be redetained than were those who were not concerned. However, this difference is rather small. Of the 11 youths who were redetained, five expressed

concern with school problems, while only six did not. It is likely that a larger sample would not reveal such a difference, or even may find one in the opposite direction.

Some of the expected relationships which were not found include no relationship between the amount of time in detention and recidivism. Also, there was no relationship between placement location and recidivism or between the amount of time in the community and the amount of time detained for the next time.

Discussion

Some of the findings of this study were consistent with what is indicated in the literature on recidivsm of adults. For example, the more comfortable the youth is with the rules of probation, the more likely he or she is to remain in the community. The smoother the transition, the less the likelihood of redetention. The number of days in detention initially was related to the number of days in for the first redetention, which is as expected.

However, nearly half of the first redetentions occurred more than 76 days after release. This is contrary to the literature which indicates that most failures occur soon after release. Similarly, the lack of certain expected relationships (stated above) is not consistent with the literature.

It appears therefore, that the variables which are related to recidivism of adult offenders are not necessarily the ones which are related to recidivism of juveniles. These relationships warrant further and deeper investigation with a different and larger sample.

However, this study makes it clear that the potential differences between adults and juveniles can no longer be neglected. The two populations do not face the same problems, and programs aimed at reducing recidivism through careful and planned reintegration programming must investigate and identify the differences. Only in this way can the needs of juvenile offenders, in terms of reintegration programming and recidivism, be addressed.

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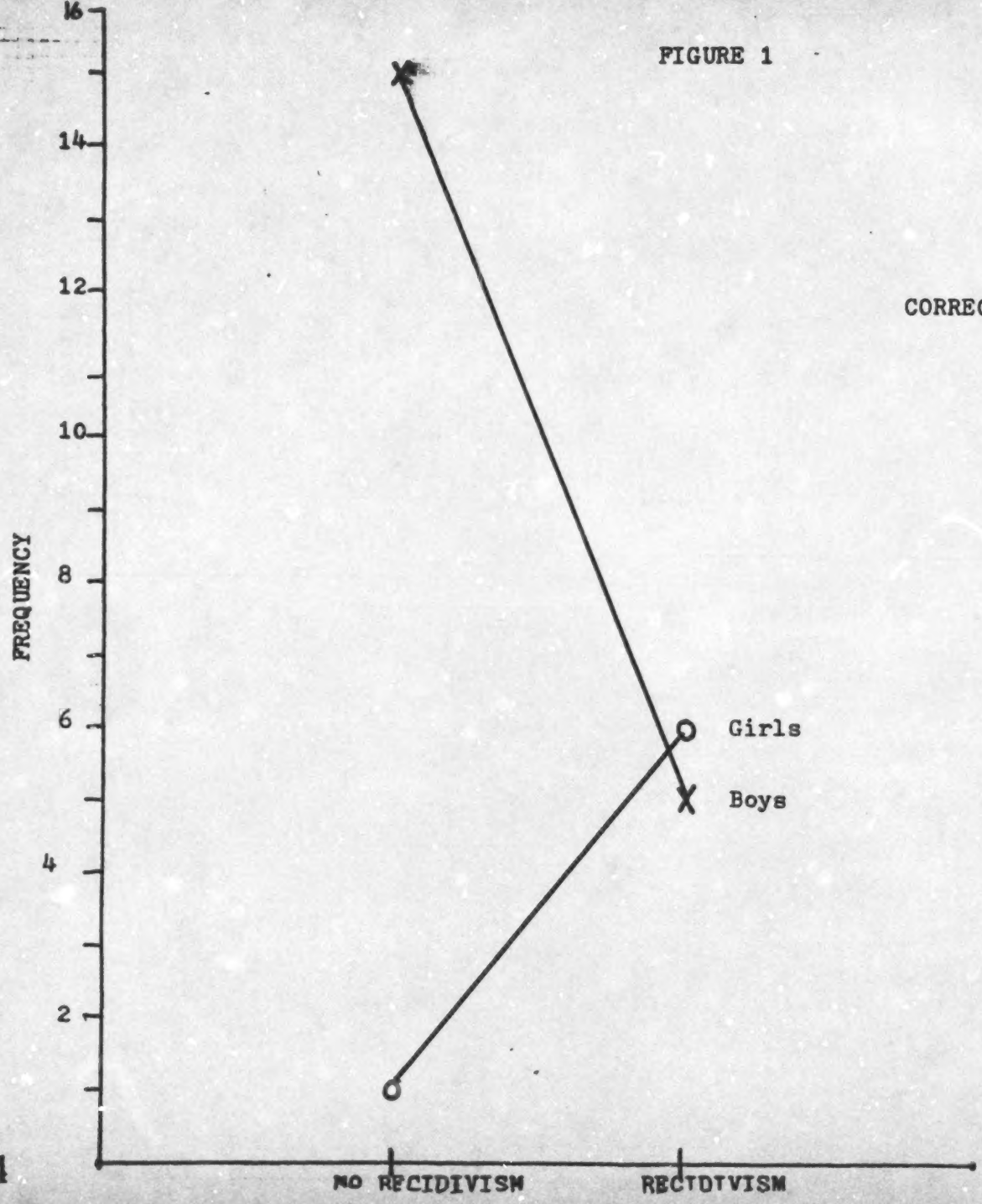
FIGURE 1



CORRECTED X^2 = 5.60, p .05
PHI = .54

FIGURE 2

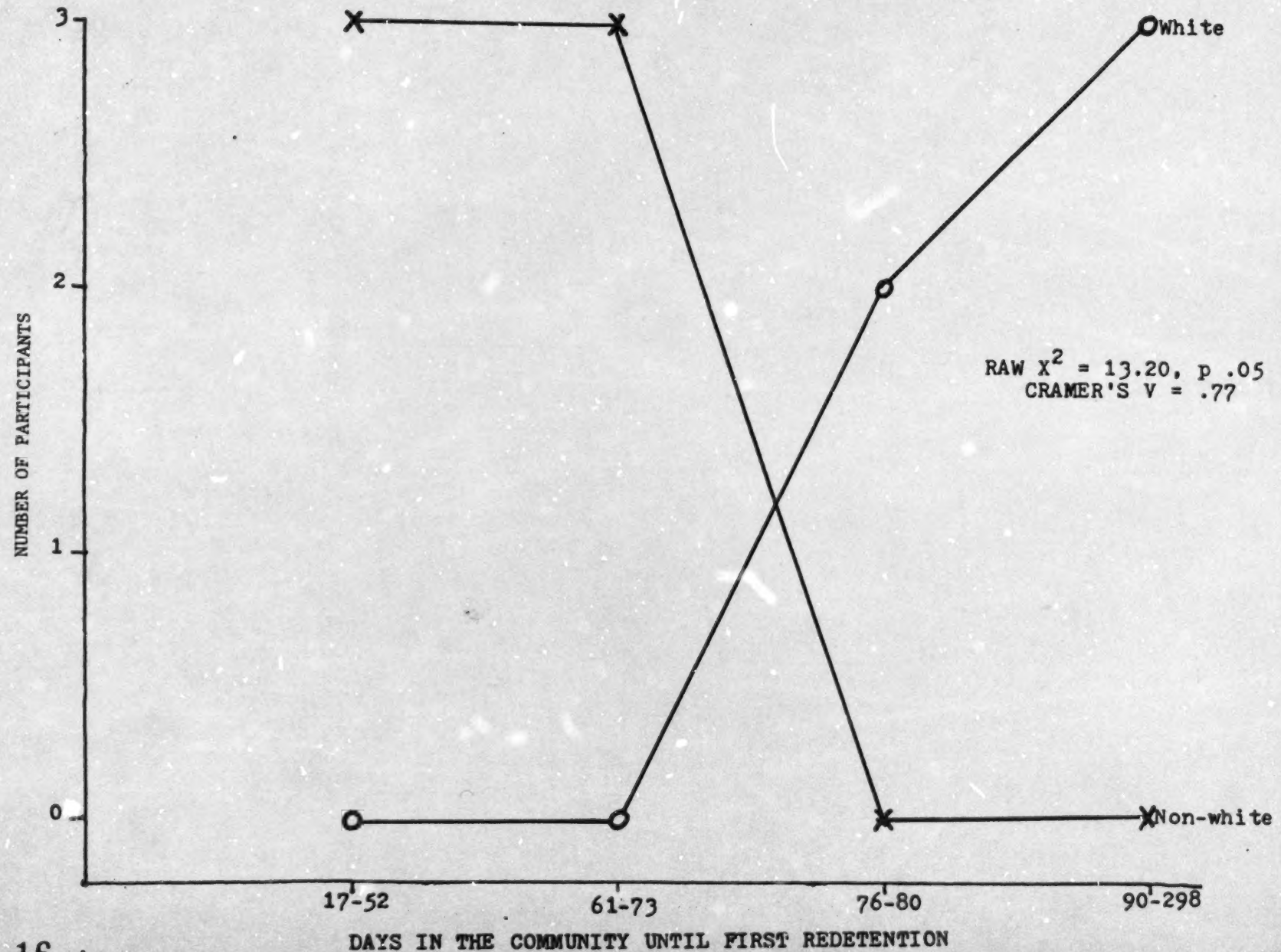

3
2
1
0
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
White
Non-white
RAW X^2 = 13.20, p .05
CRAMER'S V = .77
17-52
61-73
76-80
90-298
DAYS IN THE COMMUNITY UNTIL FIRST REDETENTION

FIGURE 3

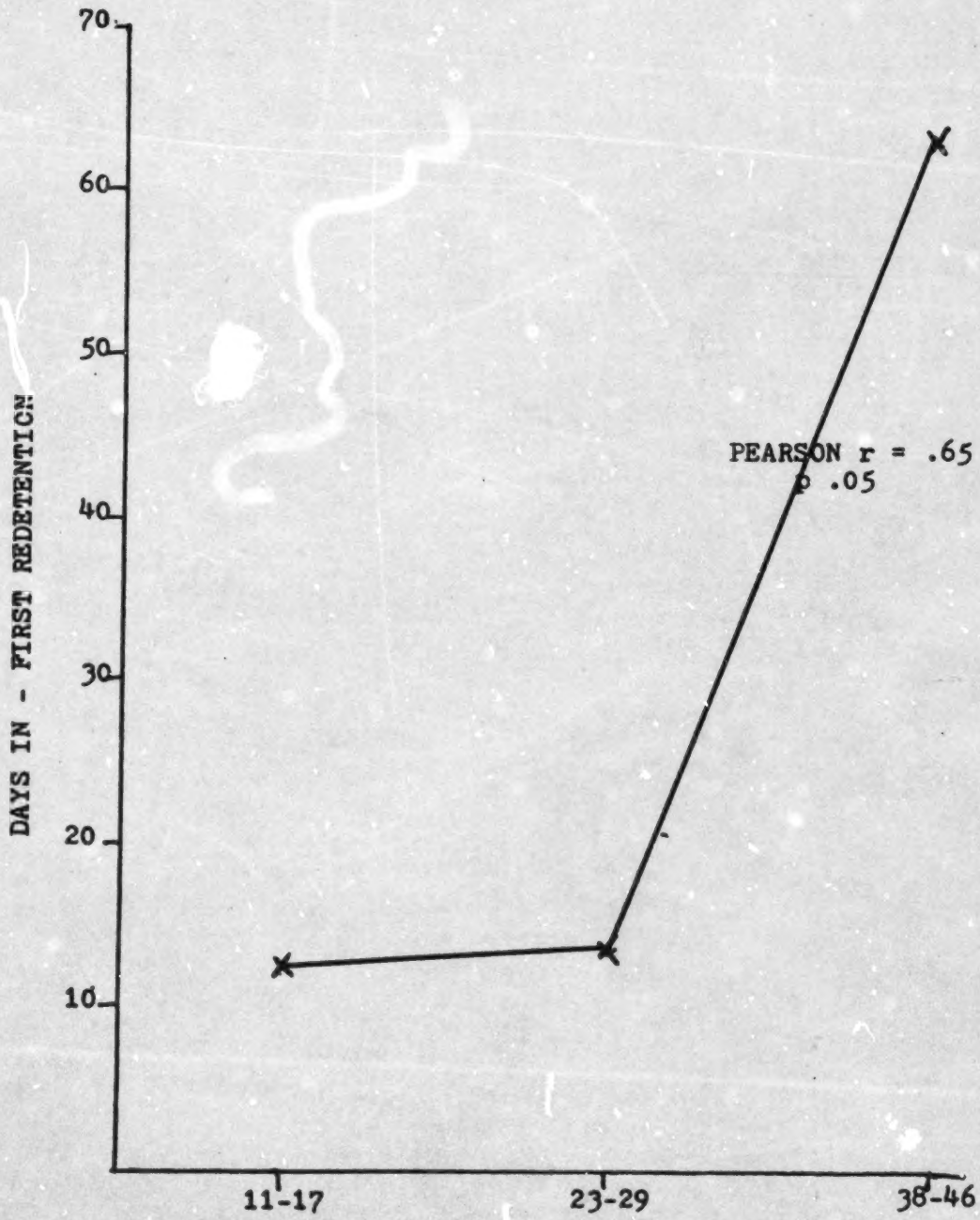
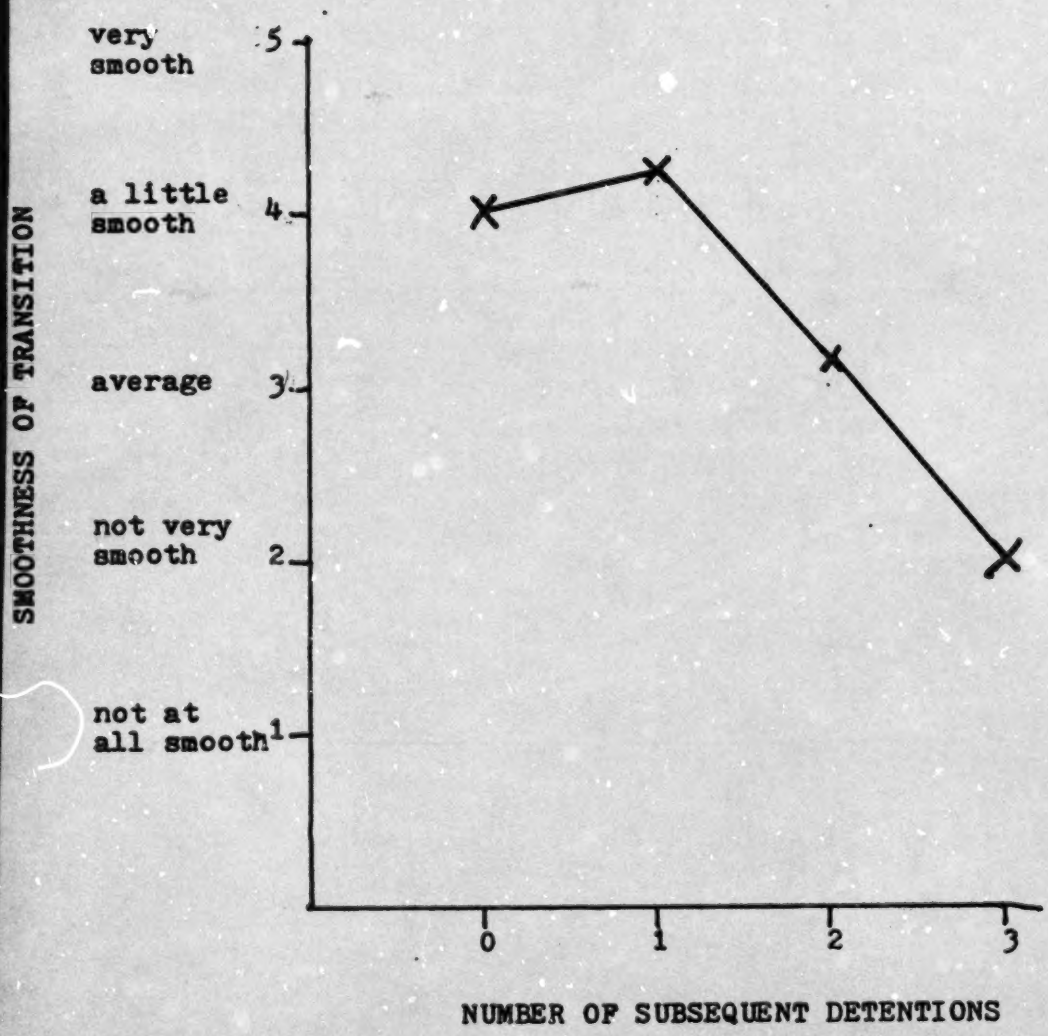

70
60
50
40
30
20
10
DAYS IN - FIRST REDETENTION
PEARSON r = .65
p .05
11-17
23-29
38-46
DAYS IN - REFERENT DETENTION

FIGURE 4



PEARSON r = -.40, p .05

FIGURE 5

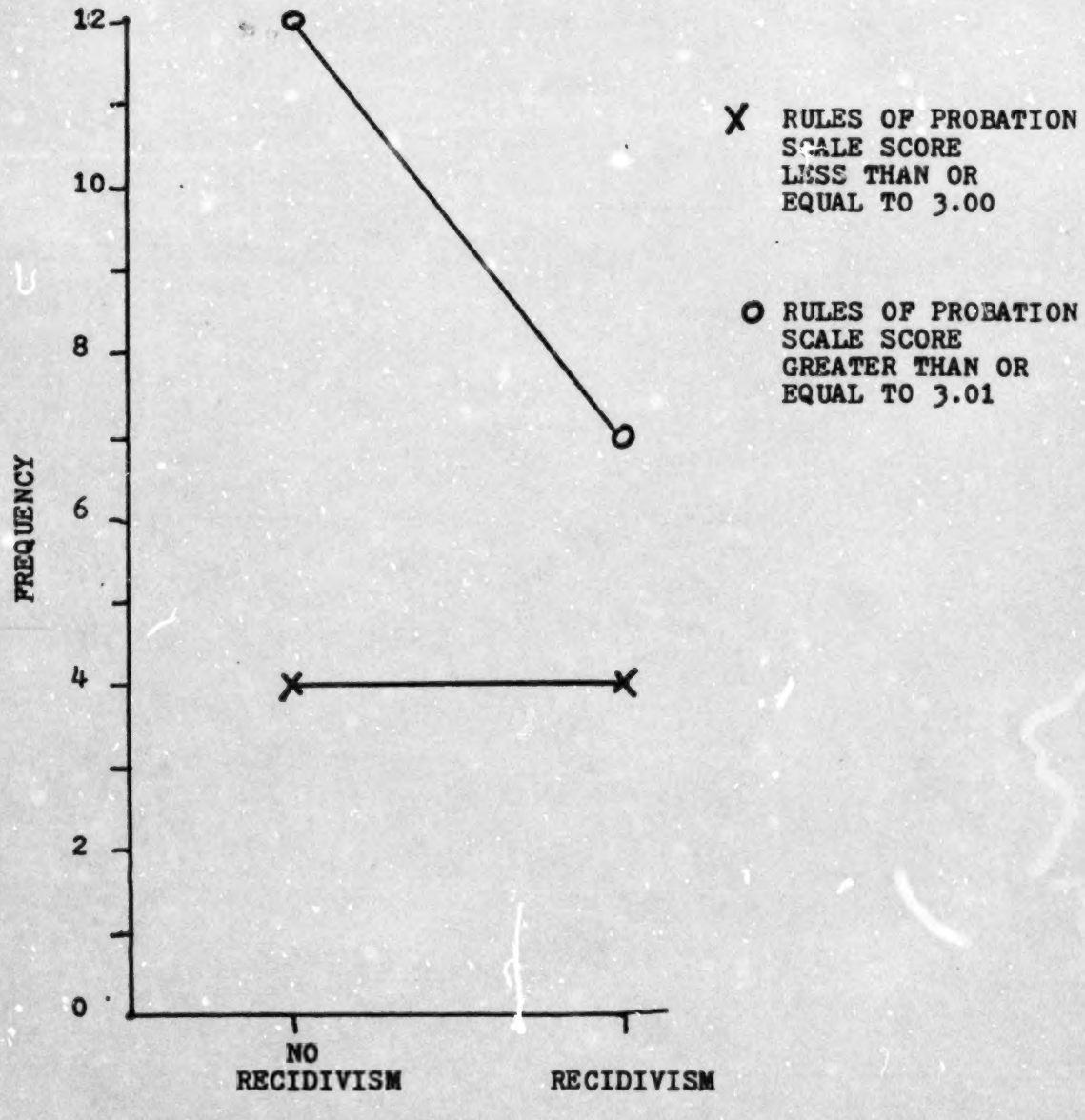
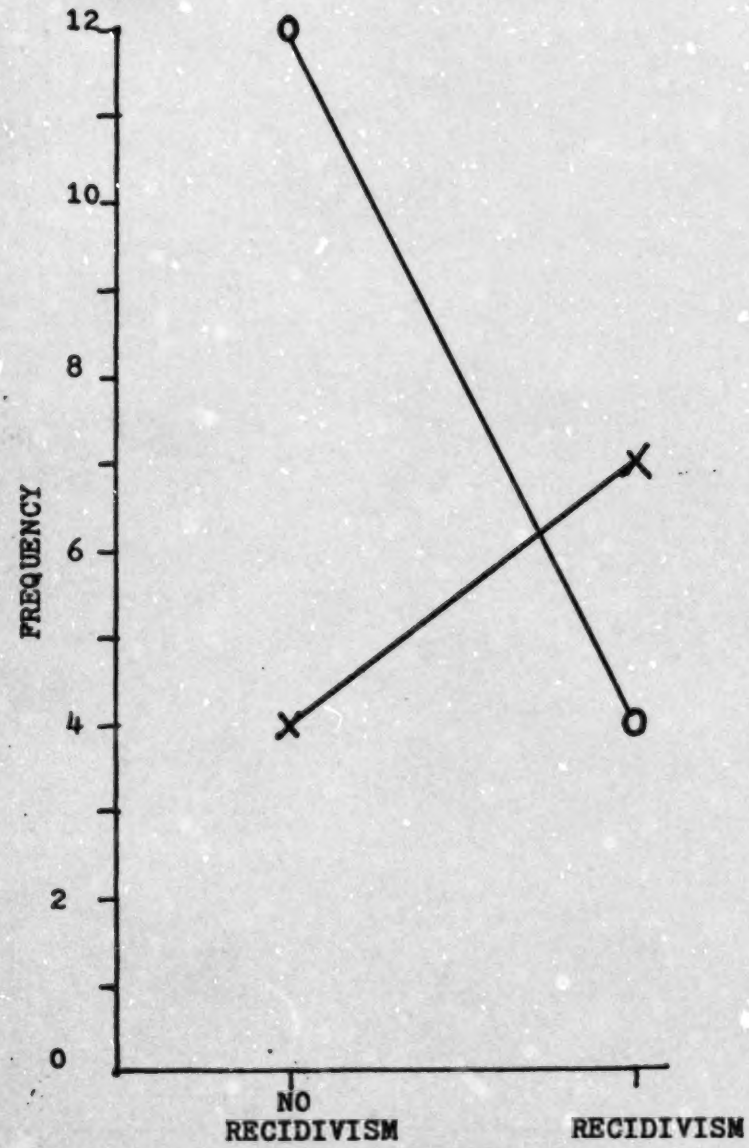

12
10
8
6
4
2
0
FREQUENCY
NO RECIDIVISM
RECIDIVISM
X RULES OF PROBATION SCALE SCORE LESS THAN OR EQUAL TO 3.00
O RULES OF PROBATION SCALE SCORE GREATER THAN OR EQUAL TO 3.01

FIGURE 6



X SMOOTHNESS OF TRANSITION SCORE LESS THAN OR EQUAL TO 3.00 (NOT SMOOTH)

O SMOOTHNESS OF TRANSITION SCORE GREATER THAN OR EQUAL TO 3.01 (SMOOTH)

Table 1

Scales/Variables Crossed With Recidivism

Scale/Variable	Chi Square	Cramer's V
Relationship with Caseworker	60.84*	.87
Comfort with Others	47.25*	.76
Concern About School Problems	41.51**	.72
Rules of Probation	32.87**	.64
Smoothness of Transition	19.19*	.49

* = $p < .05$

** = $p < .001$